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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes various theories of youth activism and makes a projection of what adolescence may be like by the year 2000. The major objective is to aid social scientists and futurists as they attempt to interpret the role of youth in social and cultural change. The hypothesis is that observation and analysis of recent and contemporary adolescent behavior, values, and attitudes can provide insights into the future because adolescents embody the future in the present. This hypothesis is based largely on analysis of youth activism in the 1960s. Specific predictions about adolescents in the near future include that they will be fewer in number in the United States than in many other countries, will continue to be more of a visual and oral than a writing and arithmetic generation, and will be increasingly influenced by technological advancements. Major factors that will shape adolescents by the year 2000 include: globally the population will be younger, the length of adolescence will increase in industrialized societies, schools will develop more alternative educational programs, society will become more computer oriented, and increasing conformity in business and government will be offset by considerable pluralism in culture and morality. The conclusion is that, although forecasters disagree about whether recent youth rebellions were revolutionary or counter-revolutionary in nature, they generally agree that (1) we are in the midst of a social transformation which will alter future life and values, (2) youth is largely responsible for releasing the great futuristic debate in America, (3) technology will be at the center of social transformation, and (4) the preeminence of the United States is not guaranteed by the year 2000. (DE)

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The Future of Adolescents

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Whatever difficulties adolescents offer parents, they regularly frustrate forecasters. The reasons for the failure may be more revealing than the prophecies. First, the capacity of adults to miscalculate adolescents is in direct proportion to the greater freedoms granted to them. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to argue that in this century adolescents have constituted the first official minority (even before women) or original second class citizens and were granted more each generation until at this point many feel that a substantial portion of the youthful population is beyond societal control. Second, all the time forecasters were talking about adolescents in a changing world and seeking to measure the impact of those changes on the young, we were ignoring the extent to which young people constituted a major source of change itself. In fact, I would go so far as to say that adolescence constitutes a cutting edge culture by embodying the future already in the present, and by not having the decency or the courtesy to allow the current generation the time to live out their history. The most powerful example of such youthful usurpation occurred during the student rebellions of the 1960's, especially in the United States.

No futurist forecasted that rebellion. Other professionals were equally off guard. Thus, the psychologists generally believed that whereas anti-social behavior was regularly part of growing up angry and moody, it would be individual and abortive, but never collective and successful. The sociologists conceded that the cultural indictments of the young were significant, but no real dislocation of the social structure had occurred during the riots. The culturists concluded that although there was significant structural shifts, the culture had remained pretty much intact. Whatever the individual blind spots, all commentators failed to recognize that no single event before or after the sixties provided youth with such centrality; and even twenty years later the issues that were raised then still constitute the agenda of the remaining decades of this century. The central issue that youth dramatized is nothing less than the future of the future.

As such, youth presided over a historical divide which had all the divisiveness of both a cultural and structural civil war; for what emerged was not a single clear-cut direction for the future, but a major debate about the future that has not ceased to this date and that in fact establishes the context for all forecasting for the balance of this century.

Although there is considerable disagreement about whether the rebellion was a counter revolutionary or a revolutionary force, there is strong agreement about at least three historical notions. First, we are the midst of a major social transformation which will alter future life and values. Second, at the heart of that transformation will be technology and its many-splendored and/or many-shocking wonders. Third, history is not necessarily on our side. The preeminence of the United States is not guaranteed by the year 2000. These quite significant points of consensus are as substantive as the nature of the disagreements.

One major interpretation of the rebellion is that for all the bravado about being a revolutionary movement against the system, the young had all the marks of a counter-revolutionary force. This is the view more or less held by Brzezinski, Daniel Bell, Alvin Toffler, Bruno Bettelheim, Herman Kahn and others. All these see the inevitability of a certain kind of society—a post or superindustrial, highly technological society managed by a knowledge elite, dominated by complex large-scale organizations or megamachines, global communications networks, etc. The immediate impact of such a projected world on the young would be to require more, not less, education. As a result, they would be required to remain young even longer than past generations have had to be. Above all, a technetronic society needs decisive executives, computer programmers, systems analysts, communications experts, and highly trained scientists. The traditional fields, like humanities and social sciences, will be less required. And it is the judgment of those who foresee the inevitability of such a society that the youthful rebellion of the 60's right up to the present day is basically a Luddite-

like movement in which the young are registering their strong objections to their future obsolescence. They see themselves as without function or purpose in such a society. They also identify with Nature as a common victim of the rapacity of the machines and progress, and their advocacy of love over war, flowers over gun, is part of that romantic return to a period when machines were either absent or docile. In these terms, the rebellion is a rejection of progress and the fulfillment of the American dream by General Motors, General Dynamics, or General Electric.

The opposing view is held by Theodore Roszak, Charles Reich, Abbie Hoffman, William Irwin Thompson, Tom Hayden and recently Christopher Lasch. (The Culture of Narcissism: America in Age of Diminishing Expectations). The argument here claims that youth constitute a revolutionary not a counter-revolutionary force that ironically grew out of the very successes and failures of liberal industrialism. On the one hand, the material successes made possible new kinds of consciousness, new kinds of caring, etc. On the other hand, the failures to distribute abundance equally and fairly to minorities, the involvement in military adventures of a quasi-imperialistic nature, and the systematic assault on the environment all underscore the moral bankruptcy of the current system and the need to let the new culture of aquarius and humanism in. Far from being alien to the current society, the rebelling or questioning youth are the natural outgrowths of that society and constitute its new leaders pointing to a softer, more human world.

These opposing views resurface whenever a pivotal issue such as nuclear power plants appears once more to polarize the populace. Adherents of the first position also now point to the increasing sobriety of contemporary youth--to their conservatism and to their highly competitive interest in grades and getting ahead. But their opponents argue that the steadily deteriorating condition of the economy and the impending recession that inevitably will follow in its wake, will soon awaken all to the moral and humanistic bankruptcy of the post-industrial promise.

Clearly, even at this juncture neither side will yield; and so it is necessary perhaps to call for a position of convergence.

The possibility of such an alignment is predicated on the crucial recognition that the opposing arguments neither proceed on the same lines nor compare apples with apples. Specifically, the counter-revolutionary theory stresses social structures but ignores cultural considerations; the revolutionary theory ignores social structures but stresses culture. The net result is that each passes its half off as whole; or each has what the other needs. Thus, on the basis of the opposition, the notion of a significant future for the computer and a significant future for the arts would be at odds; whereas in fact they are not at odds at all. In fact, many of the professionals who attend the computer conventions in New York constitute the major attendees at Broadway shows and at Lincoln Center. What I am suggesting in other words is the notion of historical simultaneity—namely, that both positions or a number of positions can exist side by side. Once such complex multiplicity is accepted as a new norm it compels at least two other complementary positions. The first is that the social model of a society in equilibrium is probably inadequate and should be replaced by a social model of a society in conflict or at least in regular divergence. What that means in turn which is especially profound for the young is that the foreseeable future—the next twenty to fifty years—will remain transitional, turbulent and uncertain. The notion of a transition finally yielding to a new state of equilibrium after the dust has settled, will not occur for generations, if ever again. Instead, transition will give way to transition which in turn will give way to another transition. A culture of temporariness, of present orientation, of flux will dominate; and as a result change will become a norm. The second notion is that we will need to see doubly all the time. We may come to lament the extent to which conformity increases in the future; but we also will be aware of the extent to which individual styles will achieve almost unlimited expression.

The schizophrenic split between society and culture will continue with the former becoming more rigid and the latter becoming more attractive precisely because it can function as a variegated antidote to excessive standardization. Even the youthful hypocrisy of surviving with affluence may become the national creed precisely because it combines noble sacrifice with patriotic consumption.

Youth, thus, was largely responsible for releasing the great futuristic debate in America which I have tried to summarize and which ironically may characterize and predict their lives as they grow up. But significant though that comprehensive framework is, the subject of the future of adolescence deserves more closer scrutiny and larger, more global frameworks. And for that we have to cultivate a sense of the scale or measure of adolescence--its demographic personality as it were.

Demographics fully used is not limited to numbers but possesses considerable conceptual power. Specifically, projections can be made not only of how many, but also of what kind; and how much of that kind may be new or nostalgic. A major case in point is the capacity to designate chronological cultures—cultures or subcultures that have an existence only through a band of time or age span. The first major chronological tribe to be so identified in this century—in fact, in 1904—was that of adolescence. The category has proved its durability by its capacity to accommodate change. In any case, chronological calipers still are proving to be perhaps a more reliable or precise measuring device (than say perhaps race or religion in the U.S.) as witness the most recent chronological classification of senior citizens. In fact, one of the most rapid and perhaps ironic conclusions one can draw from this juxtaposition of the categories of adolescence and senior citizens is that the latter may have more of a future than the former, at least in the United States; and further that the United States may more resemble the Old World in age when set against the present and future global picture than the New World it embodied two hundred and even one hundred years ago. In any case, adolescence has been around long enough to support a history of adolescence. What that history would have to display, as Gary Gappert in The Post-Affluent World maintains, is simultaneous multiplicity. Namely, that at leave five generations currently exist; and that by the year 2000 six to seven may coexist. That means in terms of our focus that there are at least five different age spans and sets of generational values that currently coexist. But my purpose here is less to profile the various pasts as to present a series of national and international projections of what adolescence may be like in the future—by the proverbial 2000.

Providing a rationale for focusing on adolescence also begins the process of describing its particular power as a category. The most obvious value is that adolescence is prefigurative. By very definition it is a period of maximum transition—neither childhood nor maturity—hence adolescence or little adult; or even Kenneth Keniston's preferred substitute, youth. Indeed, as the most intensely ambiguous state of all stages of existence, one even might be able to predict the capacity of that generation for handling ambiguity and change by virtue of the way they handle adolescence. Another important factor is that the adolescents are impressionable and reflect the stamp of their age's difference. Thus, the current generation of young people both in high school and in the first two years in college are frequently and accurately described as the TV generation in that their birth and upbringing are virtually coincidental with the beginning and evolution of TV. Equally as important, they are more of a visual and oral than a writing and arithmetic generation—hence deficiencies of basic skills—a process reinforced by the enormous visual influence TV has had on the production of textbooks and pedagogical materials. But perhaps the most important reason for projecting adolescent futures is that methodologically it strikes a neat balance between long range and precision. Specifically, if one limits for example the chronological spread of adolescence from 13 to 19, one can comfortably talk about adolescents in the year 2000 with a strong sense of realism; for the nineteen year old would be born next year in 1981 and the 13 year old in 1987, or years before the end of the decade.

Here then in summary form are some of the major factors that will shape adolescents by the year 2000.

1. Globally the bulk of the population will be younger. In Africa, one half of the population will be under 20 by the year 2000. In contrast, one third of the population in the U.S. may be over 60. Thus, the U.S. in the future may be viewed as one of the older countries not unlike the way historically the U.S. viewed Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. What

will be critical--and the outcome is perhaps not known let alone predictable-- is what effect being young in a older country will have on the young; and what effect being perceived by the young of other countries as being part of the establishment will have on youth. In other words, it will not be enough for adolescents to undertake the conventional search for identity; they also will be engaged in justifying their identity as youth, globally.

2. A related factor but too important not to be stated separately is the extension factor of modern science and civilization. When applied to the focus on adolescence what this means is that young people will be young longer and older people will be older longer. All research documents the contributions of highly industrialized societies to the increase in length of adolescence. Specifically, puberty and physiological maturity have been occurring earlier and earlier, and those trends will continue in the future. At the opposite end, there will be perhaps a permanent increase from 22 years old for adult independence to between 24-26 years old. These extensions at both ends of the age spectrum suggest an increase in the marginality of young people for longer periods of time than ever before. If that marginality also characterizes the relationship of older people to the society, then the central drama of the year 2000 may be the relation between the generations, as the relation between the classes was the central social issue of the earlier part of the century.

3. Such a long period of transition or ambiguity may prove too intense for many adolescents and what probably will surface, especially in education, is a series of new norms, many of which are visible already now. The old norms in college, for example, are full-time students and part-time students. Full-time finished in four years of college, part-timers

finished in eight. The new norms are full-time working students, some working full-time, others half-time, others one third-time; and part-time students carrying limited educational loads. The time it will take to finish is a total variable. There will still be colleges of course that will keep the old pattern of a basically young adult world intact but increasingly they will be in the minority as more veterans return to college (if the draft is restored that number will increase substantially) and as older people in general intermingle with young adults. In short, whatever forms it may take, the future generation of adolescents will be ingenious in finding ways of growing up and working out various forms of independence while they are contained in this now extended marginal period of their lives.

4. The present generation of adolescents as well as the one immediately to follow are socially unique in that they contain more offspring from divorced homes raised by single parents than any previous generation. Lest one conclude that this pattern is limited to the U.S. and as such, is a sign of increasing decadence, a survey of the stability of marriage in forty non-European countries randomly selected in Asia, Africa, North and South America revealed that 24 of the 40 countries had divorce rates in excess of those of the U.S. and further that 30-40 of the countries showed no difference between men and women in initiating divorce. Although it is still too soon perhaps to know the full effects of divorce on the psychology of a future generation, one can reasonably conclude that a segment of those from divorced homes may avoid marriage altogether or marry without having children. That trend may be reinforced by the new and apparently nonpathological option of homosexuality on the one hand, and the life of the singles groups (a paradoxical coupling) on the other hand.

That in turn may be undergirded by the general economic availability of apartments or condominiums. The singles thrust more than any other single factor has been largely responsible for the resurgence of urban living. The net result is that a substantial portion of the adolescents of the future will be seeking a life that is child-free, and their economic and political position will be to support those who recognize the value of zero population growth. At the same time because of the tremendous increase especially on the part of the young of religious fervor and even evangelicism, a substantial portion of young people may return to large families. On this issue alone there is a very good possibility that uniformity which has always been a reliable characteristic of adolescent culture may not be operable in the future. Or that the only way such uniformity may remain is regionally. Such disparities between young people is already apparent in those young people who are against the nukes and those who are against the kooks who are against the nukes. To sum up the problem, the market researchers have their work cut out for them as far as future adolescent social patterns are concerned.

5. The next generation of adolescents, more intensely than the current one, will be exposed fully to the ideology of scarcity. In particular, they will have been raised on diminished and diminishing expectations--there may not be enough to go around for everyone; things may not last long enough for you to get your share. That generation already will have learned that they are being penalized for their fewer numbers; and they may not be able to understand why they should be penalized because there are fewer of them. What will particularly intensify their situation is that their generational span will be the terrible inbetween one--between dwindling natural resources on the one hand and no real big technological breakthroughs on the other hand. But whether or not things are used up, what is

clear is that for the future generation of adolescents the days of the conupcopia and of unlimited growth are over, at least until the end of this century and probably into the first two decades of the 21st. What that means is that instant gratification will be replaced by delayed gratification pretty much the way delayed adulthood may be the extended norm. When and if that predominates then a current trend now may gain greater force and application--the trend of behaviorial modification.

B. F. Skinner in Walden Two indicated that the central malady of the modern world was the inability to tolerate and withstand frustration. What I am suggesting, therefore, especially in light of increasing emphasis on behavioral goals, is that the dominant psychology of the future may not be Freudian but Skinnerian; or that Skinner may turn out to minister to the many while Freud to the few, but that perhaps in either case the key adolescent need may be frustration management. The traditional form that delayed gratification took historically in the past is that of religion, which may account in part for its resurgence now.

6. No forecast can exclude the impact of technology. As noted, current adolescents are largely what the media has massaged them into being, which includes being more visual and oral than written and conceptual. That influence may still persist although the massive and often urgent efforts of back to basics to remedy the deficiencies created by television may be sufficient for redress of the imbalance. But the crucial new technology that will shape the current and especially the new generation of adolescents is that of the computer. It is already estimated that as many as 68% of the work force will use computers directly or indirectly in their work by the early 1980's. Computer assisted instruction especially under the new futuristic aegis of the autonomous learner is steadily increasing in use especially where productivity has had to become an educational as well as

economic factor. The computer games in particular, the computer learning toys like "Little Professor" already are preparing the new generation of adolescents for a regular relationship with machines. The prediction then is that the future adolescent will have been raised in greater proximity to the computer than any generation of adolescents before him; that is an autonomous learner he will spend more time learning by himself; and that he may form better or equally significant relationships with machines than with human beings. In fact, Skinner would totally dominate if he could add to his behaviorial modification techniques, the psychology of human-machine symbiotic relationships, for the future adolescent may spend as much time with machines as with human beings.

In summary, what then are the over-all patterns of the planet of the young by the year 2000?

In the U.S. there will not be as many of them as there are in most countries of the globe. Nor will they command the visibility of numbers the way they used to. Although because of scarcity and other factors, they will not have as many opportunities as perhaps other generations have had--the planet appearing to be all used up--they will not be militant, at least in the U.S. They have virtually no knowledge of the student revolts of the 60's; and they do not appear to be even interested in the movement, although their professors often seem obsessed by it. They will not mutiny because generally they will be a less revolutionary, more conservative group. They will be used to intense competition and conclude that mutiny only wrecks your chance at getting ahead. Many of the others will not revolt because of religious values. They will create all sorts of new and complicated arrangements with their education and with their spouses or girl friends or boy friends to the point where it may all be unclassifiably fluxy. But they will expect the institutions and the laws of the society to be

responsive to their variety. Increasing conformity in business and government will be offset by considerable pluralism in culture and probably in morality as well (which is why the arts will flourish in the future). The notion of lifelong learning as a gift either of enlightenment or leisure probably will not be the way things go. There will be life-long learning but it will come about because of the necessities brought about by changing jobs and information obsolescence than by genuine love of learning. Equity between the sexes should be assured in Western countries by the year 2000 unless women are excluded from the military draft. The major group challenging the inequities of society in the United States will be Spanish-speaking, for the latinos are projected to be the largest minority by the end of the century. Adolescents will have a healthier respect for machines than any other generation before them. The prospect of voting for a computer for president of the United States by the year 2000 may be more attractive than voting for a female minority figure; and offer more hope for sanity than any of the human candidates. Finally, insofar as it is the obligation of the present generation to hold the future together so that we do not bequeath a shattered house, then it will be the major task of future adolescents to hold the United States together as a global force, for the future of humanistic democracy in the 21st Century is neither automatically assured nor deserved. But perhaps with that notion we come full circle, for traditionally, it has been the special task of the young to bring new urgency and freshness to that historical responsibility.